

**Remote Assessments FAQ General Information**

***Virginia Division of Consolidated Laboratory Services  
Virginia Environmental Laboratory Accreditation Program***

**FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

**GENERAL INFORMATION REGARDING  
COVID-19-RELATED REMOTE ASSESSMENTS**

July 22, 2020; Updated February 1, 2021; Updated October 25, 2022

**How is VELAP responding to the challenges brought by COVID-19?**

VELAP assessors and management have continued to work throughout the pandemic to provide ongoing services to certified and accredited laboratories. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has prompted the need for having available an alternate approach to performing onsite laboratory assessments to ensure safety for the assessed laboratory staff, and for safety for the accreditation body staff.

To meet VELAP's ongoing responsibility to perform assessments of laboratories accredited under 1VAC30-46, or certified under 1VAC30-41, 1VAC30-45, or the Tuning Fork Protocol (QT 2364), VELAP may use procedures to conduct assessments remotely using increased focus on pre-assessment data package review and interviews done by video conferencing.

**When will remote assessments be used?**

Remote assessments will be used for laboratory assessments as determined by VELAP as a risk reduction tool while navigating through ongoing effects of COVID-19. The determination of when remote assessments will be used includes a risk-based evaluation process and takes into account [CDC's COVID-19 Community Levels](#).

Efforts will be made to avoid two consecutive remote assessments. Should circumstances cause two consecutive remote assessments, laboratory staff should expect a brief supplemental on-site visit at a later date, which will be announced to the laboratory in advance.

**What should my laboratory expect a remote assessment to be like?**

Assessors will review a sampling of the records and documents that support the laboratory's accreditation or certification, and assessors will conduct staff interviews virtually using videoconference or teleconference. A remote assessment may be supplemented with an on-site assessment.

### **What are some examples of causes for a supplemental on-site assessment to be performed after a remote assessment?**

Examples of when a remote assessment may be supplemented with an on-site visit include but are not limited to:

- After an initial assessment for a new applicant has been performed remotely
- After two subsequent routine assessments have been performed remotely
- After a remote assessment when videoconferencing was not possible
- After a remote assessment which included findings identified as those which may directly impact the quality of reported data
- After a remote assessment which included findings identified as critical findings on the assessment report
- After a remote assessment in which all requested data was not available to the assessor through electronic means
- After a remote assessment which included repeat findings
- After DCLS' receipt of a complaint from a data user when the most recent routine assessment has been performed remotely
- After a remote assessment which indicated significant changes in the laboratory operations, staff, or adherence to quality system requirements since the most recent on-site assessment.

### **What kind of technology will my laboratory need?**

Remote interviews will be conducted using videoconferencing (preferred) or telephone conferencing. Internet service is required for videoconferencing. Videoconferencing may be done using a cell phone. VELAP will host videoconferences using Microsoft Teams and will send a link to the laboratory for the conference. Instead of using Microsoft Teams, the laboratory may 'host' the meeting using a different teleconferencing platform if deemed acceptable by VELAP.

Since every situation is different, VELAP may host a "pre-meeting" for the purpose of testing the videoconferencing capability of the laboratory and answer questions before the scheduled assessment.

**Please direct any additional questions by email to [Lab\\_Cert@dgs.virginia.gov](mailto:Lab_Cert@dgs.virginia.gov).**